Benjamin A. Norris
1849

FAMILY HISTORY
Documentation

Age	Date:	Fact:
	1849 1847	Wandering alone toward the West

Document or Source of Information:

Meanwhile the great Nauvoo temple was completed, and Joseph helped guard it while howling mobs swore to tear it down. Even though their world seemed to be coming apart, Joseph and his family continued to labor in the work of the Lord. On January 25th, 1845 Joseph's brother John Deans Murdock married Mary Jane Norris in the new Nauvoo temple. We know not what, if anything, happened to Jeanette Risell, according to Joseph's journal the girl John Deans married at New York.

But an even stranger mystery was in the making, for John's new wife had a brother in New York State, Benny Norris, then only 7 years old, who came with his parents to Nauvoo to be with his sister. His father, David Norris, was a blacksmith at Nauvoo, and during the fighting there in September, 1846 he was killed while defending the city from the mobs who were burning it. Mrs. Norris died during the exodus from Nauvoo, leaving poor Benny to fend for himself, since his sister and her husband John Deans had already fled the burning city.

Young Benny Norris became just another of the homeless thousands wandering hungry and alone on the frozen prairie. But he knew his sister had moved west, and somehow he set out to find her, and against all odds he succeeded. The story of Benny Norris and his life with the Murdocks was destined to be as strange a tale as any ever heard on the frontier.

30. Diary of Peter Conover, Utah State Historical Society, and The Carthage Conspiracy, Pg. 195, Dallin Oaks, University of Illinois Press, 1975.

Joseph Stacy Murdock Life & Times

had noticed that there were wild onions, choke-cherries and other wild fruits growing in the mountains close by, which was encouraging to him.

From Ft. Bridger there was no river to follow. Clouds of dust hung over the herd as it moved, and cattle bellowed for water. Joseph was now following the trail of the Donnor Party of 1846, and he couldn't help but think of the terrible tragedy that befell them when half of their party froze to death in the mountains, and he urged everyone to move faster so they could cross the mountains before snow fell. They reached the head of Echo Canyon early in September where they encountered heavy brush and a narrow, muddy creek, difficult to get wagons across, and it had to be crossed every few miles. Unknown to Joseph then, one day he would be called upon to defend that canyon against the United States Army.

Just inside Echo Canyon they passed Cache Cave, a strange, large hollow rock where Mountain Men had carved their names in years long gone. The mountains seemed to close in so as to leave hardly room for a trail, forcing them to string their stock out for miles. They couldn't bunch the herd again until they left the canyon at the Weber River. The country was easier to get through once the river was reached, and they had little trouble until they came to Salt Springs, now the site of Henefer, where they turned up Bauchmin's Creek, now East Canyon Creek, to Pratt's Pass and Big Mountain. They had to cross Bauchmin's Creek 13 times in 8 miles, in a jungle of thick willows and heavy mud, through clouds of vicious mosquitoes. Sally was exhausted and only her faith that the valley and the end of the trail was near at hand kept her going.

Joseph and his herders had to push their wagons over Pratt's Pass at Big Mountain, where they got their first view of the promised valley and the Great Salt Lake glistening in the sunset beyond. It was a sight they had dreamed of for months, and each knelt to offer a prayer of thanks. Their long ordeal was nearly over, and the following day they half slid and fell down the near vertical slopes of Big Mountain to the low pass over Little Mountain and into Emigration Canyon and into the valley of the Great Salt Lake, united in hardship and poverty but anxious to meet their friends and brethren of Nauvoo once more.[9] The

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9. Diary of Sally Stacy Murdock, in possession of Paul Murdock, SLC, states the Murdocks entered the valley in August, not September

Spencer-Eldredge party which followed them arrived at the valley on September 22nd, 1847, re-uniting Joseph and his small band with the First Emigration Party.

The trail from Nauvoo had been a long one, more than 1,000 miles by wagon road and half that far again by cattle trail. Although starkly beautiful, the valley was a foreboding place, for it contained not a single green tree or shrub, and already snow had whitened the mountain peaks. At her first view of the valley, Harriot Dow Young, who arrived with Brigham Young and the Advance Party had said, "*We have come 1,500 miles to get here, but I would gladly travel another 1,000 miles rather than live in such a forsaken place as this!*"[10] On January 8th, 1836 during the persecutions at Kirtland, Joseph Smith had reassured Brigham Young's brother Lorenzo Young, husband of Harriot Dow Young, while he was suffering from consumption that "*One day he would be safe from the mobs and would live to a ripe old age among the Saints in the Rocky Mountains.*" Now as the Prophet had promised, he had reached a safe haven in the heart of the Rockies, but at first glance it was far less than he had hoped for, and he later said, "*Not a green thing was in sight, and the ground was covered with millions of black crickets.*"[11] But Joseph, like Brigham before him, recognized the valley as the place Joseph Smith had seen in vision and had described to them. It was enough.

The strange story of Benny Norris took still another strange twist, for only a few weeks after the arrival of Joseph's pioneers and the Spencer-Eldredge Party, young Benny, only 7 years old, walked into the valley. He had wandered barefoot and alone across the plains. He had an Indian arrow in his shoulder which he would never talk about, nor would anyone ever learn in what kind of encounter he was wounded. He would only say that sometimes he would pass or be passed by other travelers, some of whom gave him things to eat. At other times he would find a few scraps of food on the prairie, or a piece of meat where some wild animal had been killed. He said that some travelers had offered him a ride but he refused, saying that he had to hurry ahead to find his sister, Mary Jane Norris, who was on the trail somewhere ahead.

After her husband John had been buried in an unmarked Indian grave at Sarpe's Point on the Mississippi, Mary Jane and her mother began walking

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10. Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 14, Pg. 98.

11. The Gathering Of Zion, Pg. 31, Stegner, McGraw-Hill, 1964.

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westward, just two of the thousands who were lost during the great exodus from Nauvoo. Somewhere along the trail Mrs. Norris died, leaving Mary Jane alone and Benny forgotten and wandering somewhere on the endless prairie. Mary Jane somehow found passage with a wagon train heading for Zion, but Benny was not so lucky. At Salt Lake City, Joseph adopted Benny Norris and he was raised by the Murdocks, living part of the time with Sally and Nymphus and later with Joseph. There would be much more to his strange story as time passed.[12]

12. Men of the Rockies, Pg. 48, N.C. Hanks, 1944.

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